



My Next Steps:

Mental Health Supports for Transitioning Service Members and Military Spouses



Question

What mental health supports are available to our family during and after my service member's transition from military to civilian life?



Answer

Mental Health. Behavioral Health. Emotional Health. These terms are often used interchangeably to describe our health as they relate to the way in which we think, feel, and act as we deal with everyday life. As a military family, you may have experienced multiple separations, moves and possibly even deployments, and these experiences may have contributed to feelings of excessive fear, worry, anger or sadness. If you or someone in your family needs help, there are available resources to assist every member of your military family.

Throughout your service member's career, he or she may not have pursued services due to fear of discrimination or harming his or her military career. Even though the Department of Defense is making strides to reduce the stigma surrounding seeking mental health services, some individuals may feel that stigma still exists. Through research, we know it is common for service members to experience a variety of mental health issues, such as excessive stress, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression. For that reason, you should always encourage your service member to seek mental health services if they are warranted.

Now that your family is preparing to transition from the military, you and your service member will likely experience some of the stressful changes that come with this major life event. For that reason, you and your family need to know about the available resources that can help maintain

your mental health. The following is a brief list of some resources you can use as a starting point to seek help for your service member or yourself. If you have additional questions, consider discussing your options with a mental health professional.

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Before Transition or During Transition Planning

No matter what, if there is a mental health emergency, such as you or your loved one is harming you, his or herself or others, the best response is to call 9-1-1 or go to the nearest emergency room.

Maybe you're not sure if you or your service member needs mental health services. Through TRICARE, you

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Resources at a Glance

- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration](#)
- [Military OneSource](#)
- [TRICARE](#)
- [Department of Veterans Affairs](#)



Answer (cont.)

have access to free mental health screening tools that are anonymous self-assessments to see if you are experiencing symptoms with a mental health issue, such as depression or anxiety. You can also speak to a nurse on the Nurse Advice Line. The screeners or the nurse can provide insight into what further services may meet your needs.

If your service member needs extra support, he or she can then seek the advice of his or her primary care manager at a military treatment facility and review the available options. Your service member, while active duty, will need a referral and prior authorization for all mental health care. As a military spouse, you can look for outpatient mental health services provided through TRICARE. You do not need a referral or prior authorization for outpatient mental health treatment. What this means is that you can find a therapist or counselor to work with. Remember, you may want to consider the financial impact in your choice of an in-network or out-of-network provider. Visit the TRICARE website for more information.

For military spouses who need mental health services but have difficulty getting to a provider's office, you may want to look into Telemental Health options offered by TRICARE. Telemental health is provided by a network of providers who can evaluate, treat and refer you as necessary via video. Your service member can also explore this option, though he or she will need a referral to receive care.

Although, you, as a military spouse, may not need authorization to start seeing a mental health professional in-person or virtually, it may be beneficial to reach out to a TRICARE representative to ensure you are finding all the available resources. Call a representative from TRICARE West or TRICARE East or visit the TRICARE website.

Finally, if you have insurance through your employer, you can contact your insurance company to see what types of mental health care are included in the policy for you and your family. This can be particularly helpful for continuity of care as your family's end-of-service date nears.

After Transition

Help for You or Your Service Member After Transition - If your service member transitioned prior to retirement, your family may choose to utilize some of the temporary military-

connected health insurance programs that are available and include coverage for mental health services. However, you may need to find other options for your long-term mental health needs. One option may be the health care plan at a new or pre-existing job.

Because your service member is a veteran, your family may also be eligible to receive a variety of family support services from the Department of Veterans Affairs. A link to the "Guide to VA Mental Health Services for Veterans and Families" is included in the Resources section of this document. For example, as part of the VA's Mental Health Services, the VA's Vet Centers, Mobile Vet Centers, the Vet Center Call Center and Coaching Into Care can provide assistance. The Vet Centers offer readjustment counseling to help ease the stresses of the transition from military to civilian life, while the Vet Call Center provides around-the-clock, confidential help for veterans and their families to help with the transition process. If you need help encouraging a veteran to seek mental health services, Coaching Into Care is a national telephone service of the VA which aims to educate, support and empower family members and friends who are seeking care for a veteran and hope to "coach" them into seeking mental health services.

Help for You and Your Service Member after Retirement - If your service member retired from the military, your family may still be eligible for and continue to use a TRICARE-managed health care plan. This means that for all family members, except the retired service member, the mental health care options may remain the same or similar as they were while the service member was on active duty. Your service member and your family will also be eligible for the aforementioned VA services. Regardless of your long-term health insurance plan, it would be wise to connect with the policy holder to ensure you can continue to see a mental health provider with whom you may have already established a relationship. Your mental health care will also change if you transition to TRICARE for Life, as Medicare will become your primary payer for mental health care.

Because of the variety of services available for military families and the different eligibility requirements to receive care, be sure to call or visit the TRICARE and VA websites to learn more about each organization's services to keep your family strong and resilient.



Steps to Consider

These “Steps to Consider” are not meant as a checklist. Use the suggestions to facilitate a discussion with your service member.

Status and Planning

- Determine what health insurance you currently use for your mental health care.
- If you or your service member is receiving treatment for any mental health concerns, determine how your transition out of the military can impact the care you are receiving. You may need to collect records, reestablish eligibility or update insurance information.
- Be sure to gather mental health care records and documents from all military and non-military providers prior to transition.

Resources

- Review some common mental health needs among military service members and military families at the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration’s website](#).
- If you have questions about other targeted types of mental health care provided by the military for issues, such as sexual assault, post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury, review Military OneSource’s inclusive list of [Mental Health Resources](#).
- Review the free, anonymous [mental health screeners offered by TRICARE](#).

- If you need help encouraging your veteran to seek out services, visit the [VA’s Coaching Into Care](#).

Options

- Review the TRICARE website to learn more about the [mental health care options available through TRICARE](#).
- Review the [VA website](#) for information on [VA health care and mental health services](#) that may be available to your service member or your family through the VA.
- Use the [SAMHSA Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator](#) to find local mental health care information.

Additional Considerations

- If your service member plans to file a disability claim with the VA, mental health records are an important part of his or her complete health assessment. Discuss this with your service member, and [find a veteran service officer or accredited VA representative](#) to get help filing the VA disability claim prior to transition.
- Watch the “Understanding VA Health Care for Transitioning Military Families” MySTeP Video and download the My Next Steps Fact Sheet.
- Review all other MySTeP Emotional Health Support My Next Steps Fact Sheets and videos.



Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration: <https://www.samhsa.gov>
- Veterans and Military Families: <https://www.samhsa.gov/veterans-military-families>
- Behavioral Health Services Locator: <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>

Military OneSource

- Military OneSource: <http://www.militaryonesource.mil>
 - Mental Health Resources: <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/health-wellness/mental-health/mental-health-resources>

TRICARE

- TRICARE: <https://www.tricare.mil/>
 - Free Mental Health Screeners: http://screening.mentalhealthscreening.org/Military_NDSD
 - Mental Health Options: <https://tricare.mil/CoveredServices/Mental/GettingMHCare>
 - Information about regions: <https://www.tricare.mil/About/Changes/General-TRICARE-Changes/Regions>



- VA: <https://www.va.gov/>
- Coaching Into Care: <https://www.mirecc.va.gov/coaching/>
- Guide to VA Mental Health Services for Veterans and Families: https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/MHG_English.pdf
- VA Mental Health: <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/>
- VSO Information: <https://www.benefits.va.gov/vso/index.asp>



- Managing Stress and Seeking Non-Medical Counseling During and After Transition from the Military
- How to find Local Mental Health Services During and After Transition from the Military
- Support for Concerns about Substance Use or Abuse During or After Transition from the Military